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The Friday Letter

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January 6, 1989

Come Share in the Tribute to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday will be celebrated by the Nation on January 16. This marks the fourth year King's birthday has been commemorated as a Federal holiday.

To honor his birthday, headquarters will present a special program on January 11 at 10 a.m. in Conference Room 400. Administrator Anna Kondratas will give the opening remarks. The keynote speaker will be Lavonia Perryman Fairfax, a marketing communications specialist with Pizazzz Communication, Inc., Washington, DC. Fairfax will share some of her personal experiences with the King family and talk about King's dreams--then and now.

All employees are encouraged to attend.

-Story by Gloria McColl
Civil Rights and EEO Division

New Study is Released on Food Stamp Errors

A new study has confirmed FNS data showing that efforts to reduce food stamp overpayments have not led to an increase in underpayments.

Food stamp quality control policy promotes payment accuracy by offering enhanced funding to state agencies with low error rates and imposing fiscal liabilities on those with high error rates. Until recently, state fiscal liabilities were based only on overpayment error rates. This focus led to some concern that an emphasis on reducing overpayment error might increase underpayment error.

The Office of Analysis and Evaluation looked at this possibility in 1985 and found no evidence that reductions in overpayments were achieved at the expense of increases in underpayments. The new study--prepared by Abt Associates for FNS--extends that initial work using more recent data and somewhat different methods.

The study confirms and strengthens the conclusions drawn earlier. In fact, the evidence suggests that lower overpayments have been associated with lower underpayments.

Additional information on this study can be obtained from Steven Carlson at 756-3133.

-Story by Steven Carlson
Office of Analysis and Evaluation



School Lunch Still a Success, After All These Years

Most children in Colorado's North Conejos County School District--one of the Nation's poorest--eat a hot lunch every school day at little or no cost. Over two-thirds qualify for a free or reduced-price meal. In 1946, Centauri Junior High in tiny Capulin, Colorado, was the first school in the state to sign an agreement for the National School Lunch Program.

The school in Capulin predates the National School Lunch Program. Its building was partially funded by the WPA to serve children in the largely agricultural region. Two members of the school board who brought the lunch program to Capulin still live there. Benito Muniz, who was raised on a farm and had no chance to go to school, and Irene Gonzales, mother of eight and a former teacher, still take pride in their school's progress.



Benito Muniz was a member of the Capulin school board who signed the first lunch agreement in Colorado in 1946.

Gonzales knew that a lunch program could help better conditions in Capulin. She became its first coordinator, a title that meant doing "most of the running." She often had to charge groceries until the end-of-the-month reimbursement check came through, but she persevered and kept strict records. Lunch was a nickel for those who could afford to pay. Today, it's 50 cents for elementary children, 60 cents for junior or senior high.

In 1946, the school board members didn't just sit around a conference table. Muniz recalls drilling through rock to bring well water into the school where it was pumped in by a windmill because they didn't have an electric pump. He hauled thousands of free bricks across the state to help build the walls of the school gym.

Today, the district includes three elementary schools. Combined with the high school in La Jara and the junior high in Capulin, the district serves 1,136 students.

Capulin's lunchroom serves almost every child in the school. Principal LaMont Morgan can't remember seeing a single kid bring lunch from home this year. He credits the "really good food" prepared by cooks Vera Vigil and Sara Quintana, who prepare everything from scratch for 150 to 160 children daily.

Vigil has been cooking in the district 19 years and keeps local favorites such as enchilada casserole in mind while following USDA meal patterns. She picks up fresh produce at the market on her way to work and praises the variety of USDA commodities that help stretch the budget.

You don't see much plate waste in Capulin. Vigil says the kids like the food, but she has been known to make the chili milder for seventh graders until they get used to it "the way it's supposed to be."



-Story and photos by Joanne Widner
MPRO Public Affairs Staff

MPRO Strengthens Ties With Field Office

The fall conference of the Colorado Social Services Technical and Business Staffs (SSTABS) provided a means for closer working relationships between Mountain Plains regional and field office staff and Colorado Social Services personnel at every level.

MPRO Food Stamp Program Director Al Nickels and Denver Field Officer-in-Charge Irene Wise presented a workshop entitled "County Awareness: What the Feds Can Do for You." Those who attended the workshop learned more about the roles of regional and field office staff.

Nickels discussed the new Hunger Prevention Act and its ramifications for local workers. He also spelled out the function of FNS staff. Wise reviewed retailer compliance operations and how the field staff monitors Colorado stores. The workshop sparked considerable interest--Wise said she has had inquiries from 14 Colorado counties since the meeting.

Other speakers included Tim Gard of the Montana eligibility investigative staff, whose presence was made possible by state exchange funds. Workshop topics included new technology, program fraud and abuse, welfare reform implications, impact of newly legalized aliens, and behavioral topics such as stress management, work situation techniques, and the effect of AIDS on the workplace.

About 350 of the 700-plus SSTABS members attended the conference. Because of good feedback from eligibility workers, issuance staff, and county directors attending, FNS has been asked by SSTABS President Annie Ross to repeat the workshop at the group's next meeting in Colorado Springs in May. Wise was also invited to observe the state's computer operation. The conference offered MPRO staff an opportunity for positive one-on-one contact with state quality control reviewers in Colorado.

-Story by Joanne Widner
MPRO Public Affairs Staff

Federal Employees Receive Salary Increase

Congress has approved a salary increase of 4.1 percent for Federal employees. The President is expected to sign the implementing Executive Order that will put the increase into effect January 1, 1989.



W-2's Are on Their Way to Employees

The 1988 Form W-2, Wage and Tax Statement, will be mailed to the employee's residence address in January 1989. It is important that employees ensure that their current residence address is correctly recorded in the Payroll/Personnel System.

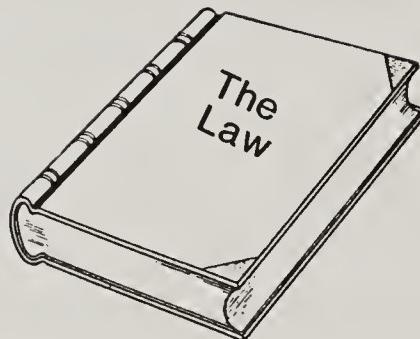
Employees can verify their present residence address by checking the name and address block on Form AD-334, Statement of Earnings and Leave, or reviewing the latest Form AD-349A, Declaration Sheet, in their official personnel folder.

Any questions should be directed to your servicing personnel office.

Midwest Region Recognizes U.S. Attorney

MWRO presented Assistant U.S. Attorney Geneva Halliday (center) with a certificate of appreciation in recognition of her diligent and extraordinary effort in representing FNS in numerous judicial actions in Michigan. This has contributed significantly to the integrity and success of the Food Stamp Program in Michigan. Also present (left to right) are Detroit Field Officer-in-Charge J. W. Younce, Civil Division chief Michael Wicks, and U.S. Attorney Roy C. Hayes.

-Story by Mary Jane Getlinger
MWRO Public Affairs Staff
Photo by Manfred Fuchs
Detroit Field Office
Food Stamp Program



Tim O'Connor Visits SERO



Tim O'Connor (right) talks to SERO Food Stamp Program employees about the new reorganization.

-Story and photo by Steve Watson
SERO Public Affairs Staff

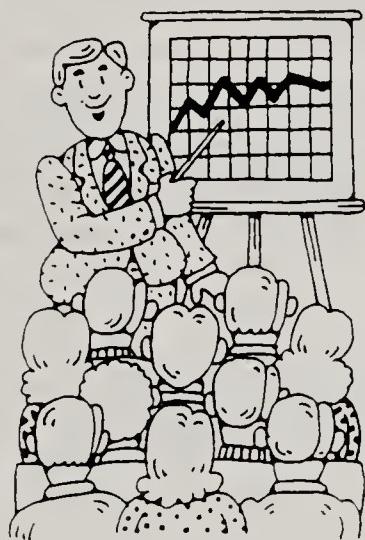
Tim O'Connor, newly appointed director of the Program Development Division, was invited to stop by the Southeast Regional Office after attending the American Public Welfare Association Food Stamp Directors Conference. O'Connor's get-acquainted visit gave some employees an opportunity to meet him for the first time since the reorganization of the Food Stamp Program office.

His visit included a session with all food stamp employees and small group meetings to answer questions on certification policy, problems with regulation implementation, and employment and training plans for Fiscal Year 1989.

"It was a very successful meeting," said Dick Dees, SERO Food Stamp Program section chief. "It gave us an opportunity to know him on a personal basis, and he was able to share his philosophy on where we're going with the program."

Training the Corporate Trainers

Southland Corporation officials knew they had a problem, but how could they solve it? Troubled by negative publicity resulting from a spate of disqualifications of its 7-Eleven convenience stores in the Denver and Salt Lake City areas, Southland turned to USDA for some answers. The corporation invited Denver Field Office OIC Irene Wise and Salt Lake City OIC Jim Dunn to speak at its annual market manager training sessions in Colorado and Utah.



Southland officials asked Wise and Dunn to discuss food stamp regulations and to answer questions from their managers and employee trainers. What were scheduled to be 1-hour sessions often turned into 2- and 3-hour sessions with a barrage of questions from the floor.

Store managers asked many questions about the sale of hot and ready-to-serve foods. Most were critical of the regulations, and they cited situations where the rules seemed vague. Many voiced concern about possible entrapment by compliance investigators.

Both Colorado and Utah managers also expressed concern that convenience stores were being targeted for compliance investigations. That belief was reinforced not just by the large number of convenience stores being disqualified, but also by the conspicuous absence of large chain stores among those numbers.

(Training Continued Next Page)

Financial Management Directors Meet in Alexandria

The regional and headquarters Financial Management (FM) directors met recently in Alexandria, Virginia.

Jack Radzikowski, deputy administrator for Financial Management, welcomed the group, commenting briefly on the death of Fred McNamara, FM director in NERO. Radzikowski announced that an annual award has been proposed in honor of McNamara and his accomplishments during more than 20 years of Federal service.

Stephen Balsam, Program Information Division Director, reviewed FM plans for several automation projects, including the National Data Bank, the Integrated Financial Management Information System, and the Regional Financial Management Information System. He distributed copies of the fiscal year 1989 Financial Management Automation Plan which describes some 42 separate FM automation projects being spearheaded by FM in conjunction with IRMD and/or contractor staff.

Other speakers included Larry Heffel and Victor Riche (IRMD) on the status of Information Resources Management plans for software renewal; and Valerie Evans, project director for the integration contract, Washington Consultant Group, who explained the Food Stamp Program Integrated Information System.

The Department's OFM deputy director, Dave Rector, and Jerry Miske, head of the Federal assistance team, were two of the guest speakers. They explained the OFM organization, as well as the influence of outside entities on USDA financial policy.

The meeting ended with a session during which the regional FM directors shared their major concerns, especially staffing and workload.

-Story by Anneva Hackley
Financial Management

CEP Administrators Receive In-Depth Service Training

SWRO Civil Rights Director Ola Moore recently addressed a group of some 45 Cooperative Extension Program (CEP) administrators and field staff from Prairie View (Texas) A&M University on FNS services available to low-income families.



Since the majority of the Extension Program clients are farmers, Moore stressed that provisions now exist in the Food Stamp Program eligibility guidelines which take farmers' special financial circumstances into account, and she pointed out that farmers who sell their produce from stalls in farmers' markets or from roadside stands may be eligible to become authorized food stamp retailers. Moore also discussed benefits available through other FNS programs and how they may be obtained.

The invitation to participate in this meeting (a 2-day in-service training session for CEP field staff) was a result of discussions between FNS representatives and the Prairie View CEP administrator during the Small and Limited Resource Farmers Conference held in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, in early October.

Moore also used this forum to talk about SWRO's use of the Outstanding Scholar provision to recruit minority employees, and she encouraged CEP staff to refer promising candidates to USDA. This was the first of several initiatives Moore plans to undertake with both land grant and historically black colleges and

universities throughout the region, in support of the Departmentwide effort to identify, reduce, and eliminate barriers to minority participation in USDA programs.

-Story by Kay Blakley
SWRO Public Affairs Staff

(Training Continued)

Wise and Dunn cited effective training programs, low employee turnover, and scanning equipment that separates eligible and non-eligible food items as reasons for lower disqualification rates in larger stores.

Since the training sessions, Southland Corporation has adopted a tough stance on store disqualifications. If a manager is involved in an illegal transaction, he is fired. If the violation occurs in his store, he is subject to demotion.

Despite some heated questions and displeasure with certain aspects of compliance enforcement, both Wise and Dunn regard their experience in a positive light.

"Most store managers have never had an opportunity to ask USDA officials about food stamps. The workshops offered them a chance to vent their concerns about the program, alleviate some of their anxiety, and gain a better understanding of how the program operates and what their appeal rights are," Wise said.

Since the meetings, telephone contact with retailers has increased now that grocers know where they can get answers to their questions. The result should be higher compliance with food stamp guidelines and better relations between FNS and the private sector.

-Story by Craig Forman
MPRO Public Affairs Staff

Food Programs Participation Update

Following are preliminary estimates of participation in the Federal-State food assistance programs for the month of October with comparisons to the previous month and to the same month of last year.

	<u>Oct. 1987</u>	<u>Sep. 1988</u>	<u>Oct. 1988</u>	<u>2/</u>
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Food Stamp Program: 1/

People participating (mil.)	18.4	18.4	18.5
Value of bonus coupons (\$ mil.)	926.1	901.3	948.5
Average bonus per person	\$ 50.25	\$ 48.97	\$ 51.30
Total program cost (\$ mil.)	1,027.7	1,002.9	1,050.1

National School Lunch Program:

Number of schools participating (thous.)	90.6	90.6	NA
Children participating (mil.)	24.6	24.0	24.6
Children reached with free or reduced price lunches (mil.)	11.6	10.8	11.6
Percentage of lunches served free	40.6	38.8	40.9
Percentage of lunches served at reduced price..	6.6	5.8	6.6
Total program cost (\$ mil.)	393.8	368.1	379.1

School Breakfast Program:

Number of schools participating (thous.)	38.7	38.7	NA
Children participating (mil.)	3.7	3.5	3.7
Percentage of breakfasts served free or at reduced price	87.4	86.3	87.4
Total program cost (\$ mil.)	55.2	50.1	54.5

Child Care Food Program:

Number of meals served in centers (mil.)	41.5	36.1	41.9
Number of meals served in homes (mil.)	28.7	30.6	31.1
Percentage of all meals served free	78.0	77.9	77.8
Total program cost (\$ mil.)	52.8	52.1	56.5

Special Supplemental Food Program (WIC):

People participating (mil.)	3.5	3.7	3.8
Food cost (\$ mil.)	115.1	122.1	121.7
Total program cost (\$ mil.)	141.2	161.0	148.4

Commodity Supplemental Food Program: 3/

People participating (thous.)	214.2	217.3	220.2
Total program cost (\$ mil.)	3.4	3.5	3.8

Food Distribution to Indians and Needy Families:

Number of projects in operation	107	108	108
People participating (thous.)	139.1	137.9	134.1
Total program cost (\$ mil.)	4.3	4.8	4.5

Temporary Emergency Food Assistance Program:

Total USDA cost (\$ mil.)	63.7	17.4	25.3
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1/ Puerto Rico has been excluded from all months.

2/ Data collected as of December 22, 1988.

3/ Includes data for all elderly participants.

Friday Letter Vacancy Listing By Vacancy Number

JOB TITLE	AREA OF CONSID.	SERIES	GRADE	CLOSING DATE	VACANCY NUMBER	OFFICE LOCATION
o Financial Manager	(G)	GM-504	14	01/31/89	89-35	NERO
o Computer Systems Analyst	(A)	GS-334	12/13	01/11/89	89-41	IRMD
o Supv Mgmt Analyst	(G)	GS-334	11	01/19/89	89-45	ASD
o Contract Specialist	(G)	GS-1102	11/12	01/19/89	89-46	ASD
o Supervisory Food Program Specialist (FNS-N)		GM-120	13	01/20/89	89-47	CND
o Supervisory Food Program Specialist (FNS-N) (Canceled)		GM-120	13	01/17/89	89-53	CND
o Personnel Staffing Specialist	(G)	GS-212	9/11	01/26/89	89-54	PED
o Supervisory Food Program Specialist (FNS-N)		GS-120	13	01/24/89	89-55	FDD
o Food Program Spec (FNS-HQ)		GS-120	12	01/17/89	89-56	SFPD
o Regional Adm San Francisco, CA	(A)	ES-120		03/31/89	89-57	WRO
o Secretary Typing	(A)	GS-318	3/4/5	01/30/89	89-58	SFPD
o Food Program Spec	(A)	GS-120	9/11	01/30/89	89-59	SFPD

Office Location

PED - Personnel Division
 CND - Child Nutrition Division
 SFPD - Supplemental Food Program Div
 IRMD - Information Resources Mgmt Div
 ASD - Administrative Services Div
 FDD - Food Distribution Division
 WRO - Western Regional Office
 NERO - Northeast Regional Office

Area of Consideration

FNS-HQ - Food & Nutrition Service Headquarters
 FNS-N - Food & Nutrition Service Nationwide
 A - All Sources
 G - Governmentwide

Mary E. Kennedy, Editor

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